

## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

16 September 2016

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Ravinthiran, V. (2016) 'Race, style, and the soul of Saul Bellow's prose.', *Essays in criticism*, 66 (4). pp. 488-517.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/escrit/cgw019>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in *Essays in Criticism* following peer review. The version of record Ravinthiran, V. (2016). Race, Style, and the Soul of Saul Bellow's Prose. *Essays in Criticism* 66(4): 488-517 is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/escrit/cgw019>.

## Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

[L]ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

[R]THE SOUL OF SAUL BELLOW'S PROSE

# Race, Style, and the Soul of Saul Bellow's Prose

VIDYAN RAVINTHIRAN

‘WHO IS THE TOLSTOY OF THE ZULUS? The Proust of the Papuans? I’d be glad to read him.’<sup>1</sup> What Saul Bellow said in 1988 during an interview with the *New York Times Magazine* has damaged his reputation. His views on race, and culture more broadly, don’t make him a fashionable writer. In a soundbite culture, where an individual remark is enough to remove an author from the serious regard of the politically conscientious, it would seem that those passionate about his work should redirect attention away from the interviews, and towards the fiction. Bellow is often championed as a stylist, one of the greatest prose writers of the twentieth century; a defensive action, perhaps, on the part of his admirers, as if style could ever be divorced from content. Cynthia Ozick describes a celebratory symposium of 2005 at which James Wood, Martin Amis, and Ian McEwan waxed lyrical over Bellow’s prose. Arguing, however, that ‘language – the acclaimed style – cannot be the whole’ of his achievement, she asks

where was the century, the century that Bellow’s reality-stung inquisitiveness traversed almost in its entirety, from Trotsky to Wilhelm Reich to Rudolf Steiner, where was the raw and raucously shifting society he knocked about in, undermined, reveled in, and sometimes reviled? Where was his imagined Africa, where were the philosophies he devoured, where were the evanescent infatuations he pursued, where was the clamor of history...?<sup>2</sup>

But Bellow’s infamous remark about Zulus and Papuans doesn’t only reveal his ignorance of African literary culture and his fear of the black presence in US life; it also expresses a, to him, essential aspect of the creative imagination.

Bellow wanted ‘the soul to speak out at the dinner table’, and no doubt felt he was doing, in his ‘Zulus and Papuans’ gambit, something of the kind. Yet in the place of authentic speech what we get sounds like the compulsive blurting of a grouchy old racist; one of those ‘spontaneous expressions of ill will’ which plague Shawmut, the narrator of ‘Him With His Foot in His Mouth’.<sup>3</sup> That word, ‘spontaneous’, is important to Bellow: linked by him with race, and blackness in particular, it suggests a core self which one wants to think of as deeply good but which may be discredited by such utterances. Bellow writes memorably about race in three historically distinctive novels. *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) was published at the start of the Civil Rights Movement; *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970) responds to the anti-Semitic threat of Black Power, and a broader counterculture; *The Dean’s December* (1982), published during Ronald Reagan’s second term as president, links the misery of communist Romania with the slum life of Chicago, and allows Bellow to revisit his previous depictions of African Americans in a posture of both self-defence and self-criticism. There is an underlying continuity between these works, which pertains not only to the subject of race but also to Bellow’s vaunted style – which is, I think, ultimately inseparable from his social politics.

Of his breakthrough novel, *The Adventures of Augie March* – a ‘spontaneous event’; a work of ‘reckless spontaneity’ – Bellow remarked also that ‘a writer should be able to

express himself easily, naturally, copiously in a form which frees his mind, his energies'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, much like D. H. Lawrence, whom he admired, he worried that what comes naturally may not be noble but vicious. 'I believe people survive intuitively', he said. 'They do what they need to do or what they have to do in order to survive as writers. They also do what they need to do in order to destroy themselves' (*Conversations*, p. 30). And that Bellow associated the post-Romantic concept of the 'spontaneous' with modern life, but in a troubled way, is also suggested by his revision of Wordsworth's famous sentence in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: 'Wordsworth, when he tells us that poetry comes from emotion recollected in tranquillity, is speaking from a world that has gone forever'.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to cordon off Bellow's outbursts from the substantial work, because he could be said to practise in his fiction an aesthetics of outburst.

This is certainly the dominant mode of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, where the protagonist's reactionary grouching has been taken as clearly representative of Bellow's own feelings:

The labor of Puritanism now was ending. The dark satanic mills changing into light satanic mills. The reprobates converted into children of joy, the sexual ways of the seraglio and of the Congo bush adopted by the emancipated masses of New York, Amsterdam, London. Old Sammler with his screwy visions! He saw the increasing triumph of Enlightenment – Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Adultery! Enlightenment, universal education, universal suffrage, the rights of the majority acknowledged by all governments, the rights of women, the rights of children, the rights of criminals, the unity of the different races affirmed, Social Security, public health, the dignity of the person, the right to justice – the struggles of three revolutionary centuries being won while the feudal bonds of Church and Family weakened and the privileges of aristocracy (without any duties) spread wide, democratized, especially the libidinous privileges, the right to be uninhibited, spontaneous, urinating, defecating, belching, coupling in all positions, tripling, quadrupling, polymorphous, noble in being natural, primitive, combining the leisure and luxurious inventiveness of Versailles with the hibiscus-covered erotic ease of Samoa. (iii. 25-6)<sup>6</sup>

Of this racially coded passage, Gloria L. Cronin observes how Sammler's 'quarrel with Enlightenment thinking ... devolves into misanthropic hysteria'; he 'fears sharing political privilege with underclass minorities' and indulges in an 'Old Testament equation of contemporary sexual chaos with a lawless, pagan, female eroticism'.<sup>7</sup> Yet the democratic and sexual revolutions of the 1960s are pictured not only in terms of their occasionally brutal results but also with an eye to an underlying ideology – 'noble in being natural, primitive' – which Bellow in fact shares: the short-lived journal which he began to co-edit in 1960 was called, tellingly, *The Noble Savage*.

It is this vulgarisation of his most deeply held convictions which the character of Sammler – a Holocaust survivor who has crawled out of a mass grave, and hates the body – allows Bellow to articulate. 'Old Sammler with his screwy visions!': this could be Bellow mocking his hero, or the character himself mocking his mockers, under the author's protection. We should observe, even allowing for a degree of ironic mimesis or disgusted emulation, the degree to which Bellow's prose itself partakes of 'the right to be uninhibited, spontaneous'. The unstable ironic distance between author and character is not an artistic failure so much as an inevitable result of the intense spontaneity which for Bellow connects the writing on the page with the authentic voice within. Although he revised intensively – 'I can't remember how many times I wrote *Herzog*' – his grammar and syntax retain an

extempore quality; there is also a religious aspect to his conception of an 'implicit knowledge – very ancient, if not eternal – which human beings really share' and which can only be uttered by a writer who, as he admits, never knows 'what I'm going to do until I've done it' (*Conversations*, pp. 65, 96). We do feel, listening to Sammler's tirade, that we have access to Bellow's unexpurgated thoughts, for there is a place in it for his own ranting energies, which the author leaves unprotected. Traditional prose rhythms interact with the upleaping impulses of what he genuinely considers a politically radical energy.

This is one reason why critics have tended to identify Bellow's heroes with the author himself. It isn't simply the details borrowed from his life, but also the peculiarly visceral energy of the prose style which, dominating his work from *The Adventures of Augie March* onwards, is also present in important passages of his previous books. Like others obsessed with spontaneous experience – we might think here not only of Lawrence, but also Melville – Bellow's focus on the immediate and specific is paradoxically complemented by a type of unbuttoned theorising which laments its flight from concrete experience, even as it revels in its own excesses. Through the character of Sammler, Bellow leads – as he explained to Louis Gallo a writer must do – his ugliest, least 'tolerant' feelings 'into the hottest fire', to 'expose them'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the 'degree to which you challenge your own beliefs and expose them to destruction', he writes, 'is a test of your worth as a novelist'.<sup>9</sup>

On the subject of exposure, and self-exposure: the most controversial passage of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* features a pickpocket, who appears to represent the forces of unrestrained black sexuality and civil disorder. Detaining Sammler in the lobby of his apartment building, the pickpocket exposes his penis to him:

It was displayed to Sammler with great oval testicles, a large tan-and-purple uncircumcised thing – a tube, a snake; metallic hairs bristled at the thick base and the tip curled beyond the supporting, demonstrating hand, suggesting the fleshly mobility of an elephant's trunk, though the skin was somewhat iridescent rather than thick or rough. Over the forearm and fist that held him Sammler was required to gaze at this organ. No compulsion would have been necessary. He would in any case have looked.

The interval was long. The man's expression was not directly menacing but oddly, serenely masterful. The thing was shown with mystifying certitude. Lordliness. Then it was returned to the trousers. *Quod erat demonstrandum*. Sammler was released. The fly was closed, the coat buttoned, the marvelous streaming silk salmon necktie smoothed with a powerful hand on the powerful chest. (iii. 38-9)

Here is the well-worn racist myth of the well-hung black male. Bellow's prose resembles Norman Mailer's essay on 'The White Negro', where he writes that 'the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive'.<sup>10</sup> Both these Jewish writers found in African Americans a way of exploring their own relationship with white America.

In his extremely positive review, in 1952, of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* – where he praises Ellison's refusal of the 'minority tone' urged upon both black and Jewish writers – Bellow himself uses these big words in relation to African Americans, although he complicates a simple binary opposition: 'Negro Harlem is at once primitive and sophisticated: it exhibits the extremes of instinct and civilization as few other American communities do'. (In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, the pickpocket's penis is 'displayed' as in a dominance ritual, but the word, and its long sentence, also suggest a type of modern

artwork.) Bellow goes on to critique the simplistic view that 'Negroes and other minority people, kept under in the great status battle, are in the instinct cellar of dark enjoyment'; we see how, for him, blackness becomes the site of a debate about where exactly the dividing line between 'civilisation' and 'instinct' should be drawn, in mid-century America.<sup>11</sup> Eleven years later, writing about the African American novelist James Baldwin, he confronts a similar nexus of concerns: instinct, sexuality, civilisation, and the question of literary form.<sup>12</sup> And Bellow's very first, unpublished, novel, *The Very Dark Trees*, was about a Southern professor who, struck by lightning, is turned black and 'confronted', in the words of Bellow's friend Nathan Gould, 'by the reality of prejudice' – his wife doesn't recognise him at first, then locks him in the basement (*BAB*, p. 76). From the very start of his career, he was deeply concerned with racial politics, and the American meanings of blackness.

John J. Clayton appears to contradict himself about the pickpocket. Arguing first that it is not Bellow but 'Sammler, who, as much as Mailer, sees blacks as metaphors for sexuality and violence' – the pickpocket 'is acting out Sammler's buried self' – he then suggests that it may be Sammler

who attacks 'the peculiar aim of sexual niggerhood for everyone', but it is Bellow who is so trapped by fantasies of black sexuality as to use as his phallic prince a black man. *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is the obverse of, say, 'The White Negro'. Not only Sammler but Bellow himself is dealing with the same stereotype as is Mailer.<sup>13</sup>

For Mariann Russell, the pickpocket represents 'a convenient metaphor for the disturbing elements in white society and is, in the last analysis, not an image of black culture, but a mirror image of the prevailing white culture' – a level of analysis of which the novel itself appears capable.<sup>14</sup> We might also consider a submerged identification with the pickpocket, given the criminality (he was a bootlegger) which Bellow's father, Abraham, may have been forced into back in Russia as a result of anti-Semitic discrimination. Laurie Grobman argues that in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* the 'African American and Jew are portrayed as parallels in alienation and oppression', for the pickpocket's 'namelessness and absolute silence ... convey his marginal and alienated status in 1960's America'.<sup>15</sup> Bellow's most recent biographer, Zachary Leader, suggests that a 'background – of systematic discrimination and forced, some would say victimless, crime – underlay not only Abraham's and his family's subsequent attitudes to the law, but Bellow's fascination with those who lived outside it'.<sup>16</sup>

That the prose is self-aware of its scandalousness is suggested by Bellow's later novel *The Dean's December*, in which he revises the pickpocket as an admirably refined black ambassador to Romania who also has a fancy 'necktie' and whose banisters are described with that same word, 'iridescent'. Trying to prosecute, in his role as college dean, the black murder of a white student, Corde has written controversial articles about the slums of Chicago which resemble Bellow's own utterances and which make him, in the eyes of his countercultural nephew, a racist. He laments the way in which 'the effective black "image" had been captured by the black gangs, the Rangers and the El Rukins, and the outlaw chieftains – black princes in their beautiful and elegant furs, boots, foreign cars' (iii. 862). Yet the language used to ironise the conspicuous consumption of these 'chieftains' seeks transformation inside Bellow's portrait of the ambassador who tries to help Corde and his wife visit her dying mother in Romania:

This man, quite black, very slender, had style, class, cultivation. He wore a light gray well-cut suit, and an Hermès necktie (Corde recognised the stirrup motif), and narrow black shoes which could only have come from Italy. Subtly considerate, he listened to Corde's explanations (or bombast), but obviously he didn't care to discuss Western humanism, civilized morality, nihilism East and



West. He was a busy official. (iii. 782)

If Corde is Bellow's self-portrait, we might see that parenthesis about the necktie as pointing up the connection between this character and the pickpocket from his earlier novel – the reader is meant to recognise this man. The brackets around 'bombast' also underline, rather than downplay: has Corde achieved a degree of self-criticism, or is Bellow satirising his racial smugness through an allusion to *Othello*, whose protagonist evades, says Iago, his enquiries about promotion with 'a bombast circumstance' (I. i. 13)? (This play also, as we shall see, provides a neglected subtext within *Henderson the Rain King*.)

A subtle passage skewers Corde's prejudicial assumptions – the racist logic of the glorious exception:

The Ambassador must have been one of those patrician blacks from Washington or Philadelphia whose ancestors were manumitted slaves before the Civil War. Corde had met some of those before. They had summer homes in Edgartown. This was how, probably mistakenly, he placed him. (iii. 784)

Corde's need to 'place' the ambassador like this gives him away; Richard Hinchcliffe finds in him a type of uncomfortable white 'voyeurism' which 'notices blackness and how it complies [with] or differs from the stereotype'.<sup>17</sup> His admission of potential error – 'probably mistakenly' – is not one he is willing to make when it comes to those he currently seeks to prosecute for robbery and murder.

The Ambassador walked out of the office with him to the top of the delicate marble staircase. The embassy must have been a boyar's palace once. The smooth banisters were iridescent and curved again and again like a nautilus shell. The black Ambassador from first to last was very sympathetic: the sympathy may have been no more than highly elaborated propriety, but Corde somehow didn't think so. (iii. 788)

The word 'iridescent' returns, from *Mr. Sammler's Planet*; yet the key sentence is the last one. Corde (whose very name suggests the law of the heart; 'Herzog', too, can be interpreted as 'Duke of Hearts') considers the ambassador's 'sympathy' to be a genuine impulse, not simply a 'highly elaborated propriety', an insincere show of cultural forms.

By 'forms', a word Bellow himself uses frequently and as a bridge between art and life – 'the writer ... will have to believe ... that the new forms he creates will create a new public'<sup>18</sup> – I refer both to his style, and the civilised proprieties he increasingly saw the need to protect against the social transformations of the second half of the twentieth century. Bellow claims that 'the writer works, or cultivates, certain permanent human impulses or capacities' – a formulation which seeks to reconcile art and nature (*Conversations*, p. 202). But as soon as he considers these impulses, which he thinks of as spiritual, linked to the 'soul', and the only means we have of truly understanding each other outside ideological frameworks, he begins to worry about the new cultural forms required to house them; about the takeover of the vital forces of history by groupings incapable of more than provocation. This anxiety is alive in his prose. 'Ripe', as James Wood remarks, 'with inheritance (the rhythms of Melville and Whitman, Lawrence and Joyce, and behind them, Shakespeare)', Bellow's style finds its utmost brilliance at the point of its collapse into the vernacular.<sup>19</sup> He said he wanted 'to invent a new sort of American sentence ... Street language combined with a high style'; we might add that these sentences seem to invent themselves as they go along (*Conversations*, p. 282). They appear constantly to rediscover (the reader experiences the

transition) the possibility of fusing these different registers, but the combination is always a heroically in-the-moment achievement; it is never secure.

This expresses Bellow's social politics: he wishes to explode, or outgo, received forms, but with a certain stringency. Obsessed with, and energised by, the decaying brilliance of a culture – 'I'm aware that I'm living through some sort of crisis in the history of civilization', Bellow remarked in 1973 – his was always a nuanced, not a naïve, radicalism (*Conversations*, p. 111). Clayton identifies 'one of his continuing interests' as 'the reductions and debasements of great ideas'; besides the violence of revolution, Bellow found the New Age and psychoanalytic slogans of the 1950s and 1960s (easily co-opted by big business) far too simplistic.<sup>20</sup> Countercultural thought wished to replace confining norms with a more spontaneous responsiveness to the world, assuming within each of us an intuitive core which, liberated from wizened traditions, would respond to the world creatively and justly. Bellow wants to believe this, but it's difficult for him.

Describing his flirtation with Reichian orgone therapy in the early 1950s, Leader says of Bellow that 'the belief he lost – only entertained seriously in these years – was in the curative power of untrammelled instinct'.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, he comes to champion – not unlike, curiously, F. R. Leavis – a *trained* spontaneity, possible to those who have absorbed the classics of Western literature, and who therefore know, in the moment, how to act and feel. (Bellow's heroes aspire to this condition; they achieve it only fragmentarily; there is an aspect of grace in their dealings.) His close friend Isaac Rosenfeld clarifies this view, arguing that, desperate for 'freedom', the 'trouble with' psychoanalytical radicals such as 'Paul Goodman, the anarcho-Reichians, the whole gang, is a failing of instinctive wisdom' – where that last phrase catches what both Rosenfeld and Bellow desired: a fusion of creative spontaneity, a freshly liberated sensibility, with another element which would maintain contact with higher realities (*BAB*, p. 163).

What seems to have frustrated the older, grumpier, more racist Bellow about African Americans, and the student radicals who championed their cause, was that, to his mind, they hadn't paid their dues to the culture, hadn't read the right books, before foisting themselves on the world. Adam Bellow describes his father's attitude:

As for the 1960s and the civil rights and women's movements, Saul was personally upset by the outburst of irreverent disrespect for professors and for people with deep learning and caring – the tradition itself. For him it was only your mastery of the literary canon that allowed the WASP establishment within the university to tolerate your presence.<sup>22</sup>

Bellow's own path from cultural outsider to insider made him dismissive, spiteful even, towards forms of rebellion he considered purely destructive. If, as previously quoted, he endeavoured to create, in *The Adventures of Augie March*, a 'new sort of American sentence', then the way in which that style combines the knockabout velocity of Jewish American speech with a deep understanding of prose as an abiding literary form may be said to announce, from page to page, the complexity of his social politics. His sentences, and his larger narrative structures, tell us something about how rebellious he wants to be, about the admixture of longstanding values and contemporary impulsiveness which he advocates in his interviews and defends against alternative (to him, facile, superficial) kinds of radicalism. Reviewing *Augie March* in the *New Republic* on 2 November 1953, Robert Penn Warren compared Bellow to free-verse poets who began by practising traditional forms, arguing that his 'long self-discipline in the more obviously rigorous method made it possible for Bellow now to score a triumph in the apparent formlessness of the autobiographical-picaresque



novel'.<sup>23</sup> Bellow himself would eventually wonder, in a letter to Martin Amis of 30 September 1995, if *Augie* was too 'stormy, formless' a phenomenon, typical of its age; and we should realise that neither he nor Penn Warren is simply talking technicalities.<sup>24</sup> A wider world, increasingly permissive, is apprehended in their considerations of literary form.

Bellow's conflicted depictions of black masculinity are, in part, baffled attempts to suture the shaped and the formless; the physical and the spiritual; culture and nature. It is only with these large categories in mind that we can hope to understand, for example, the idiosyncrasies of the African king Dahfu in Bellow's earlier novel, *Henderson the Rain King*. 'The notion of "blackness"', writes Alan Bilton, 'provides an imaginative space for Bellow to ... question the relation between reason and unreason in the Western intellectual tradition'; his 'intimate sense of self and essential identity' is also at stake. Published in 1959, and at odds with his standard metropolitan realism, this is a novel in which the 'uncertainty and doubt' mentioned by this critic undergo an exceptional creative transformation.<sup>25</sup> Dahfu's philosophising resembles the theories of both Paul Schilder and Wilhelm Reich, and so his eloquent pidgin lets Bellow both indulge and hold aloof from the inspiring yet deranged theories he cleaved to as an alternative to technological rationalism. Trained in medicine, the king speaks English and has been extensively educated, yet Henderson appears to feel that his wisdom, in Donald W. Markos's phrase, comes 'from some source which has been obscured in civilized man'.<sup>26</sup> In this way Bellow indulges ideas of a pre-civilised spontaneity and the noble savage while also parodying them – the humour of the novel is important.

When they first meet, Henderson is overawed by Dahfu's beauty, yet nervous of his tribal paraphernalia: 'Between us in a large wooden bowl lay a couple of human skulls'. Dahfu reassures him these are merely for use in the afternoon ceremony – brutality redeemed, once more, by social practice – as we are told that his 'lips were large and tumid, the most negroid features of his face' (ii. 241). This emphasis on Dahfu's physical features suggests Bellow's sympathy with his holistic philosophy of body and mind – also a queasy fetishisation of the black body. But we should note Bellow's reiterated conviction, throughout his work, that the tiniest details of the body are deeply revelatory of character: in his work, the conventions of realism achieve a spiritual justification. A strong belief that our immediate reactions to each other form the basis of true sympathy invalidates for Bellow any talk of our getting definitively beyond race. In a 1990 interview with *Bostonia*, he describes as untrained and 'spontaneous' – that word again – his interest, ever since he was a small child, in not 'only what people said, the content of what they said, so much as the look of them and their gestures, which spoke to me' (*Conversations*, p. 260). This is also how, speaking in 1994 to Robert Boyers, he defends the pickpocket scene in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*:

By now, twenty five years later, the whole subject has been surrounded by taboos. Now such a description would be called racist. There was no racism intended. What we human beings see, we *see* – we instantaneously note the sex, the race, the features, the facial expressions and the postures of those we meet – but we are constrained to deny the operations of our senses for ideological reasons.<sup>27</sup>

True sympathy, Bellow argues, depends on these visceral responses. When he complains about political correctness or 'ethnic protectionism', he often uses the word 'taboo', an anthropological term which suggests something uncivilised and primitive about such 'ideological' repression.<sup>28</sup> Yet his Romantic espousal of freely expressed rather than repressed or sublimated feelings prevents him from realising that first impressions don't

necessarily express our true inclinations.<sup>29</sup> In fact, they may simply give voice to our prejudices – a word Bellow uses with some confusion, remarking in the *Bostonia* interview that ‘culture is prejudice in its basic (or, if you prefer, lower) forms’ (*Conversations*, p. 262).

James Clements treats Bellow's description of people, like his description of landscapes and cities, as tied to a 'spiritual phenomenology'.<sup>30</sup> *Henderson the Rain King* complicates this, for it is less obviously connected to reality than his novels about the places where he actually lived, or the people he really met. Bellow draws extensively, obsessively, even transgressively, on his own experience, and his books are admired for their urgent documentary texture – they are valuable because they are, in some sense, true to life. Yet it is a critical commonplace that *Henderson the Rain King* is not really about Africa. Henderson thinks all 'travel is mental travel', and Ellen Pifer argues that for him, 'what lies beyond history and geography is not Africa *per se* but a sphere of reality, or a state of mind, liberated from the tyranny of death'; Nicholas Delbanco describes 'an Africa that never was or will be'; summoning two of Bellow's inspirations, Melville and Swift, Robert R. Dutton argues that 'this Africa of the mind is the *Pequod* or Lilliput, where values can be reconsidered and reality subjected to new perspectives'.<sup>31</sup> When he wrote the book Bellow hadn't yet visited Africa. Although he drew extensively on the anthropological writings he had studied, he defended the novelist's right to use his imagination: 'Have I ever been to Africa? Why should I go to Africa?' (*Conversations*, p. 7). 'Does imagination *know* anything?' he asked in 1975, seeking to defend literature against the 'tedious sort of rationality' bound up with the 'head culture' of techno-science.<sup>32</sup> The writing of a fantastic fiction about Africa was his way of answering a defiant Yes to this question, and it is very much of its moment in that writing such a novel wasn't considered, in the 1950s, the ethical dilemma it would be today. Yet Bellow's decision more purely to invent on this occasion also connects with his belief that when it comes to discussion of race, outspokenness should not be fenced in by taboos.

In 1986, Bellow remarked to Martin Amis and Michael Ignatieff that ‘the old forms of existence have worn out, so to speak, and the new ones have not yet appeared – people are prospecting, as it were, in the desert for new forms’ (*Conversations*, p. 226). Almost thirty years earlier, Henderson makes this quest in Bellow’s imaginary Africa:

The mountains were naked, and often snakelike in their *forms*, without trees,  
 /        /        /  
 and you could see the clouds being *born* on the slopes. (ii. 143; emphasis added)

The extemporised connection between ‘naked and ‘snakelike’ lends a quality of assertion to the first half of the sentence, but it is really the movement from ‘forms’ to ‘born’, and the three stresses of those ‘clouds being born’, which captures the excitement of a transitional moment – a return to a condition of absolute simplicity whence something genuinely new might be created, or create itself.

*Henderson the Rain King* allowed Bellow to write without anxiety from the centre of the American imagination – Gloria Cronin describes Henderson as ‘the American imago’ – while mocking the hubris of a Gentile millionaire based on Chanler Chapman, a wealthy descendant of the Astors on whose estate Bellow lived during his time at Bard College.<sup>53</sup> (Alfred Kazin is said by Bellow to have asked ‘what Jews could possibly know about American millionaires’;<sup>54</sup> a remarkable criticism, since today we would be more likely to question the authority of his writing about Africa and its inhabitants.) The result is a parody both of colonial adventure narratives and, as Bellow told Sukhbir Singh, Truman’s Point Four programme ‘about going out to Asia and Africa to be helpful and teaching American ways’.<sup>55</sup> Henderson’s adventures, or rather misadventures, satirise the concept of the ‘white man’s burden’ – though, as already suggested, the notion of the ‘noble savage’ is one Bellow

can't do without. The novel, with its unusually non-Jewish protagonist, betrays an anguished reckoning with his own origins. James Atlas describes Bellow's reliance, for his depiction of Africa, on the texts of Richard Burton, John Roscoe, Frederick E. Forbes, and his old professor at Northwestern, Melville J. Herskovits, while observing that his major in anthropology may have 'provided expression for Bellow's own sense of exclusion from American society – a condition that haunted him long after he had become an exemplary (and deeply assimilated) spokesman for the opportunities it offered' (*BAB*, p. 50).

Was writing about another continent without having been there also a way of insisting perversely on the truth of an outsider perspective? There's an idea here about the United States as a zone of overwhelming inclusivity: Carol R. Smith observes how 'Bellow's self-description as "an American of Jewish heritage", rather than as a hybrid Jewish American' means 'eschewing the language of the civil rights movements but echoing the assimilationist narrative'.<sup>36</sup> His curmudgeonly disapproval of special treatment for black people may relate to his own refusal of a specifically Jewish literature of what he would later call 'wounded ethnicity' (*Conversations*, p. 183). Early in the novel, Henderson recounts an anti-Semitic remark he can't explain – comparable to Shawmut's 'spontaneous expressions of ill will', and Bellow's blurt about Zulus and Papuans. He tells his Jewish soldier buddy Nicky Goldstein, 'I'm going to start breeding pigs'; and this leads him to actually go through with it; an instance of his (bad, offensive) impulses coming to shape his life (ii. 119). This is a novel in which the deep energies which animate Bellow's prose are allowed nearly free rein – unhampered by the usual close attention to city life, and Jewish American personhood – but where they also begin to question themselves, postulating a secret racial content, an anguished beating at the boundary between self and other, and a desperate reimagining of racial grievance as spontaneous creativity.

Take, for example, the scene in which Henderson's guide, Romilayu – whom he has asked to show him 'uncivilized parts of Africa', acknowledging that 'there are very few of these left. There are modern governments springing up and educated classes' (ii. 358) – introduces Henderson to the tribe of the Arnewi. What follows could be described, as Bellow has it in his 1976 Nobel lecture, as a moment of epiphany or, following Proust and Tolstoy, a 'true impression'.<sup>37</sup> Yet the reality may be more anxious and less secure:

And now I began to observe that the coloring of these people was very original and that the dark was more deeply burnt in about the eyes whereas the palms of their hands were the color of freshly washed granite. As if, you know, they had played catch with the light and some of it had come off. These peculiarities of color were altogether new to me. Romilayu had gone aside to speak with someone and left me among the natives, whose sobbing had almost stopped. Just then I deeply felt my physical discrepancies. My face is like some sort of terminal; it's like Grand Central, I mean – the big horse nose and the wide mouth that opens into the nostrils, and eyes like tunnels. So I stood there waiting, surrounded by this black humanity in the aromatic dust, with that inanimate brilliance coming off the thatch of the huts nearby. (ii. 148)

Bellow's prose – racially self-conscious, impulse-driven, explanatory and wondering in equal measure – isn't merely symptomatic; it reveals, rather, what such jumbled American feelings make imaginatively possible. The final sentence repeats and revises Henderson's assessment, a few pages earlier, of the village, glimpsed in the distance: 'From these coverings smoke went up into the silent radiance. Also an inanimate glitter came off the ancient thatch' (ii. 144). 'That' draws our attention to the repetition as we witness Henderson now flummoxed *within* the village, 'surrounded' – is that always a threatening word? – by

Africans. What happens here is that Henderson's tremendous onward drive, which has taken him from one wife to another, from calamity to calamity, from America to Africa – in a parody of Truman's foreign policy, but also an expression of the deep kinetic needs of Bellow's prose style – is brought to a halt. He must wait, passively, while his guide Romilayu consults with the tribe; and for a man who wishes to learn how to simply exist, rather than strive, the result, he wishes to believe, is a moment of transcendent contemplation, of achieved being. The assonance connecting *black*, *humanity*, *aromatic*, *that*, *inanimate*, and *thatch* appears to design a crystalline moment of self-realisation. But it also underlines the word *inanimate*, which becomes less puzzling when we consider Eugene Henderson's own frustration at his inability to move.

His initials situate him as a parody of Ernest Hemingway, and that author's macho protagonists, so we might consider here Bellow's remark of 1953: 'Only to think is to feel one's powerlessness and that is why Hemingway himself, and his heroes as well, are in extreme need of movement. They are resisting the passivity and impotence that result from the prevalence of thought'.<sup>38</sup> 'Inanimate' is, therefore, a transferred epithet; it captures Henderson's feelings about himself. And there's also something about these adjective-noun combinations – *black humanity*, *aromatic dust*, *inanimate brilliance* – which reveals the strain involved in sculpting and finalising the perception. Bellow is a brilliant and notorious describer, yet this prose gestures at what can't be straightforwardly described. We approach a complex emotional state which might relate either to what Eric Strand accounts 'a space of creative freedom between cultures', or a moment of intercultural sympathy, or something rather more vexed.<sup>39</sup>

There is a parallel here with the very end of *Henderson the Rain King*, where Michael LeMahieu identifies a type of 'aesthetic positivism, in which language intimates or demonstrates what it cannot fully embrace or express'.<sup>40</sup> Cured of his malaise, Henderson returns home by plane, stopping over in Newfoundland for fuel. The Canadian location provides an enabling strangeness, an in-between state between Africa and the United States – perhaps because Bellow himself spent the first nine years of his life living in Lachine, Quebec: 'growing up in a Canadian rather than an American shtetl', writes Zachary Leader, 'Bellow felt less need to conform to New World ways, which may partly explain the ease with which he later accepted or acknowledged his mixed cultural heritage'.<sup>41</sup> (Henderson's hero, Wilfred Grenfell, was also a medical missionary in this region.) In a passage which recalls the African ceremony in which he became a 'sungo' or 'rain king', Henderson starts to run round and round the plane, holding in his arms an American Iranian child he met on board. This is the very end of the novel:

Laps and laps I galloped around the shining and riveted body of the plane, behind the fuel trucks. Dark faces were looking from within. The great, beautiful propellers were still, all four of them. I guess I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running – leaping, leaping, pounding and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence. (ii. 413)

Most essays about race in *Henderson the Rain King* quote Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, her Harvard lectures on 'whiteness and the literary imagination'. *Henderson*, she writes, provides an instance of 'American Africanism', one of those 'figurations of impenetrable whiteness that surface in American literature whenever an Africanist presence is engaged. These closed white images are found frequently, but not always, at the end of the narrative'. The hero finds himself at the end of one of many 'literary journeys into the forbidden space of blackness ... Henderson dances, he shouts, over the frozen whiteness, a new white man in a new found land'.<sup>42</sup>

Morrison's cultural analysis has been parroted in a narrowing way by those who wish to place Bellow as a straightforward racist. What she discerns is a novel uncomfortable with its ending, for as I have argued, the energy shared by Henderson and Bellow's prose style wants to go on and on. The reader witnesses the author trying rather too hard to close out the book: a structural problem which also bespeaks its anxieties about race and selfhood. I say *its* to define *Henderson the Rain King* cognitively, as a novel trying to work through these problems; but since it is Henderson speaking, this could be a picture of the liberated millionaire struggling to make sense of his location in transit between two cultures – trying, as in that passage about the Arnewi village, to make something transcendent and salving of this mad moment on the ice. The prose suggests the urgency of an impulse trying, paradoxically, to generate the forms which might allow for its containment.

It is a complicated moment because when Henderson says 'I guess I felt it was my turn now to move', there are two possible interpretations. On the one hand, he is most obviously comparing himself with the motionless propellers. Now it's the plane which is 'still', as bodily spirit is prioritised over technology. Bellow drew out the emotional implications of 'move' in a 1964 *Show* interview with Nina Steers, where he said that all Henderson's 'efforts are a satire on the attempts people make to answer the enigma by *movement* and random action or even by conscious effort'; he also remarked shortly after that he, Bellow, finished the book spontaneously, 'in a sort of frenzy. I was very *moved* in writing the last 50 or 60 pages; perhaps that doesn't reflect in the results' (*Conversations*, 34, 35; emphasis added). In fact it does, and earlier in the novel Henderson also uses the word to connect personal feelings to objective reality: 'the earth is a huge ball which nothing holds up in space except its own motion and magnetism, and we conscious things who occupy it believe we have to move too, in our own space' (ii. 173). When Bellow pits himself against technological materialism, airplanes are often important. In the *Bostonia* interview, for instance, as he discusses the impact of specialised knowledge upon the 'radical mystery' of life:

no matter how extensive your education, you still can't explain what happens when you step on a jet. You sit there, open your book, and all of these strange mechanisms of which you haven't the remotest conception, really, carry you in a matter of hours to New York ... There's something that remains barbarous in educated people and lately I've more and more had the feeling we are non-wondering primitives and why is it that we don't marvel at these technological miracles any more? ... So we are in the position of savage men who, however, have been educated into believing that they are capable of understanding everything.

'The mysterium', claims Bellow, 'has passed to high tech' (*Conversations*, pp. 265-6). We come full circle, returned to the state of 'savage men' and sadly 'non-wondering primitives' – in a sense, we are all citizens of Bellow's Africa, though it is unclear whether it's a good thing or not that there remains 'something barbarous in educated people'. Bellow worries, here, for he believes (this is in a 1979 interview with Maggie Simmons) that if we treat rational and scientific standards as 'true, final, and eternal – we had better forget about the arts' (*Conversations*, p. 166). Dahfu tells Henderson that 'birds flew, harpies flew, angels flew, Daedalus and son flew. And see here, it is no longer dreaming and story, for literally there is flying. You flew here, into Africa. All human accomplishment has this same origin, identically' (ii. 348-9). This talk of 'origins' is an attempt to place different kinds of human accomplishment on – pun intended – the same plane. Bellow is as uncertain about the arts and sciences living peacefully together as he eventually became about the coexistence of whites and blacks in the United States.



So when Henderson says 'I guess I felt it was my turn now to move', we may understand this in terms of Dahfu, and Africa more generally, providing him with the primitive energy required to overturn the technological dominance represented by the plane, which without fuel has come to a halt. Yet the strange, rich combination of self-exculpation and compensatory assertiveness in his phrasing suggests that he is also comparing himself with the immobile 'dark faces' within the machine. They stand in for the Africans who have enabled his epiphany, yet cannot, at this crucial moment, share in it, for he has left the villagers behind and Dahfu is dead, killed by the lion which tribal custom would have him capture. As Morrison remarks, such 'images of impenetrable whiteness' appear 'almost always in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent, or under complete control';<sup>43</sup> Bellow's prose grows self-conscious. The series of disyllabic verbs that follows approaches a metrical regularity which he then ruffles, as the shift from 'leaping' and 'pounding' to 'tingling' effects a movement from bodily activity to a state of renewed consciousness. 'Pure white lining' rhymes gently with 'running' to create a sense of miraculous rightness – in fact, since 'lining' is a strange way of putting it, it seems as if the word has been discovered acoustically, through spontaneous association. Because, in Africa, Henderson became a 'sungu' or rain king, there's a hint here of rain clouds with their silver linings, although the words 'white' and 'gray', used to describe the wintry Newfoundland landscape, are more muted than silver.

Yet when 'pure white lining' comes up against 'gray Arctic silence', the chiming grows over-strong. This is what Morrison describes, using another tripartite formula, as 'the closed white image', which seeks to tie a neat bow around uncontrollable difficulties. As vitalistic movement is repurposed as closure, we recall the beautiful stasis of the Arnewi village: 'I stood there waiting, surrounded by this black humanity in the aromatic dust, with that inanimate brilliance coming off the thatch of the huts nearby'. In both cases prose seems to aspire to the condition of verse, the finality of a rhyming couplet. A language of racialised colour expresses impulses which are then crafted into savourable instances of achieved and undisturbing insight. In his 1975 'Interview with Myself', Bellow asks if extreme politicisation results in a loss of interest in the individual, and then answers: 'The power of a true work of art is such that it induces a temporary suspension of activities. It leads to contemplative states, to wonderful and to my mind sacred states of the soul. These are not, however, passive'. The final sentence is there to confirm that, although Bellow dislikes nakedly 'activist' literature, he isn't a mystical quietist providing disguised apologies for the status quo.<sup>44</sup> Considering Henderson inanimate in the Arnewi village, and, contrarily, dancing around his plane, we might identify a deep tension within Bellow's understanding of the novel itself, and how it relates the behaviour of the individual to a wider politics. LeMahieu, for instance, argues that 'Bellow does not narrate Henderson's process of discovery so much as stipulate it, almost in the form of a cliché: like Dorothy at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, Henderson realises that he's been looking for something that he had all along'. And there's a link between LeMahieu's perspective and Morrison's when he argues that 'at the moment of closure ... narrative overdetermination confronts lyrical underdetermination'.<sup>45</sup>

There is a moment in the novel when, as Henderson talks to Romilayu, he curiously resembles Othello, who uses the same standard phrase – 'the story of my life' (I. iii. 128) – to explain how he won a place in Desdemona's affections:

Sometimes after Romilayu had prayed at night and lain down I would keep him awake telling him the story of my life, to see whether this strange background, the desert, the ostriches and ants, the night birds, and the roaring of lions occasionally, would take off some of the curse, but I came out still more exotic and fantastic always than any ants, ostriches, mountains. And I said, 'What



would the Wariri say if they knew who was traveling in their direction?’ (ii. 205)

It is this overlap between Henderson’s self-understanding and that of the ‘exotic’ other that makes possible an alternative reading of the novel. *Henderson the Rain King* was published in 1959, ‘on the eve’, Gloria Cronin points out, ‘of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s’<sup>46</sup> – might the quest for African American enfranchisement be somewhere in the background? As he insists on his own inexplicable anguish – ‘I thought there was nobody in the world that could suffer quite like me’ – Henderson’s griefs align with the drive for freedom and civic respect of a different set of more straightforwardly suffering people; that he travels to Africa in search of the answer has to do with the colonial and literary texts Bellow is parodying, but it may also express in a creatively muddled way the journey of black people within the United States towards equal rights (ii. 379). The novel named for him might be seen as an expression both of sympathy with African Americans and of fear as to what effect their liberation would have on national life.

As Bellow wrote *Henderson*, desegregation was under way, aided by sit-ins, judicial rulings, and the bus boycotts usually associated with the refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her seat on 1 December 1955. In 1957, Eisenhower passed the first of two Civil Rights Acts – the second came in 1960 – designed to reinforce black voting rights. Ralph Ellison published *Invisible Man* in 1952, and Bellow’s review discovers in that book that ‘truly heroic quality’ which Henderson desperately craves.<sup>47</sup> Intriguingly, he lived briefly with Ellison during the writing of *Henderson the Rain King*, and following his separation from Sondra Tschacbasov. ‘Ralph Ellison in Tivoli’, published in 1998, is a memoir remarkable for how its tenderness towards a friend provides Bellow with an opportunity to renegotiate in the public eye his dealings with black America. The key to their relationship lay, as Kasia Boddy suggests in an essay on both writers, in their refusal to be characterised as ‘writers of the ghetto’, their insistence on a ‘liberal universalist’ alternative.<sup>48</sup> Neither man, Bellow insists, could accept the ethnic ‘categories prepared for us by literary journalists. He was an American writer who was black. I was a Jew and an American and a writer’.

Together they bring Bellow’s wife-abandoned house ‘under civilized control’, before falling out over Ellison’s ‘*chien de race*’, a dog Bellow supposedly treats like a ‘mongrel’. The word ‘race’ leaps out here, and there is also an intriguing paragraph in which the sound of Ellison at work inspires Bellow to his:

All day long I heard the humming of his electric typewriter. Its long rhythms made me feel that we were on a cruise ship moving through the woods – the pines and the locust trees, the huge hayfields plowed, planted and harvested by Chanler Chapman, my sometime landlord. Chanler, before I could be aware of it, became Henderson the Rain King.

This may exaggerate Ellison’s relevance to a novel which Bellow had been working on for years. But what fascinates is how Bellow presents his fictionalisation of the white Gentile millionaire Chanler Chapman as deeply inspired by the presence, the creativity, of a black writer. Ellison comes down to breakfast ‘in a striped heavy Moroccan garment’, wears slippers with a ‘large Oriental curve’, is ‘handsome’ and ‘with a taste for finery’; he suggests Dahfu, and perhaps we glimpse here that confusion of self and other which characterises the novel’s fantastic vision of an America-Africa which never existed.<sup>49</sup> If Bellow’s later works, and recorded comments, diagnose with complicated dismay the turmoil of an age of sexual and racial liberation, *Henderson the Rain King* is equally energised by – which does not mean straightforwardly in tune with – its own cultural moment.

Defending the absence of the Holocaust from *Augie March*, Bellow remarked that 'you wouldn't know when you're reading Kafka's letters that a world war was raging in France and in the East' (*Conversations*, p. 276). He also told Sukhbir Singh that he didn't 'think the race question enters into *Henderson the Rain King* at all ... it is too much a comic fantasy to be thought of as having any serious social importance'.<sup>50</sup> But this is clearly disingenuous, because he also defended the novel against the accusations of his tutor in anthropology, Melville J. Herskovits, who said the subject of Africa 'was much too serious for such fooling', by saying – interviewed by Gordon Lloyd Harper in 1966 – that he felt that the 'fooling was fairly serious' (*Conversations*, p. 69). It is not that *Henderson the Rain King* is a deliberate allegory, thronged with symbols of the kind Bellow, in a *New York Times* article which appeared shortly before its publication, aligned with suspicious practices of 'deep reading'. Yet there are isolated moments which might startle us into interpretation, as when Henderson contemplates Romilayu following their dangerous escape from Dahfu's tribe, the Wariri: 'in the worst of my delirium his black face seemed to me like shatter-proof glass to which everything had been done that glass can endure' (ii. 402). Several critics have described Henderson's Africa as a version of America – filled exclusively, one notes, with people of colour – although they usually mean America as an idea, not a historical community undergoing rapid and violent social changes. Literary representations of 'Africa', and the depiction of African Americans within the United States, are of course separate and complex areas of study. Yet the connection is made when Henderson's daughter Ricey brings home a foundling: 'it was a coloured child, and made a solemn impression on me' (ii. 133). This infant finds its double in the Iranian child Henderson carries with him around the plane in the closing passage.

Read this way, *Henderson the Rain King* becomes more than a politically incorrect, embarrassingly so, departure from Herzog's fabled realism; its dealings with racial politics and an impending 1960s counterculture place it, instead, at the very heart of post-war American fiction. Henderson's journey to Africa suggests, in the words of Stephanie S. Halldorson, the contemporary desire 'to find a lost authenticity' through a 'return to a primitive state'. She cites Norman Podhoretz's observation that 'the sudden popularity of Zen, Reichianism, and existentialism reflected the growth of a conviction that the source of our trouble lay deep in the foundations of Western civilization'.<sup>51</sup> The paradox, as we have seen, is that although Bellow increasingly cast himself, like Sammler, as a defender of Western civilisation, he was also attracted to this critique of its cultural assumptions – though he took from more venerable sources, such as Emerson, Nietzsche, and Lawrence, his belief, in Halldorson's words, that 'to try and conquer and change one's essential nature is ridiculous'.<sup>52</sup> Marvin Harris describes the populist version of this idea:

In the lifestyle of the counter-culture, feelings, spontaneity, imagination are good: science, logic, objectivity are bad ... Counter-culture celebrates the supposedly natural life of primitive peoples. Its members wear beads, headbands, body paint, and colourful tattered clothing; they yearn to be a tribe. They seem to believe that tribal peoples are nonmaterialistic, spontaneous, and reverently in touch with occult sources of enchantment.<sup>53</sup>

Henderson sets off for Africa partly to prove to us that 'primitive', 'tribal' values might still be noble and reconciled with the literary-philosophical heritage which evoked them as a form of self-critique – a connection which (and this was Bellow's vitally determining fear) the necessary crudities of racial and sexual revolution might sever. When Dahfu is killed by the lion he is obliged to capture – it is supposed to be his father, reincarnated – the meaning may be, as Donald W. Markos argues, that 'it is dangerous for man to regress too far back into nature'. Yet Henderson also brings back from Africa the lion

cub into which Dahfu's soul is supposed to have transmigrated. Daniel K. Muhlestein describes one reductive interpretation: 'the white man's theft – via the colonial library – of Africa's culture and heritage and meaning'; Markos thinks the appropriation of the cub relates to 'the proportion of animal nature which man can safely assimilate'.<sup>54</sup> This is not the only kind of *assimilation* Bellow was worried about in 1959, though for the moment he was capable of a generous response – however skewed, deflected, transformed – towards the African Americans seeking their true place in national life.

Durham University

## NOTES

The author is grateful to both Mark Sandy and Jason Harding for their advice.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by James Atlas in *Bellow: A Biography* (2000), p. 534. Further references to *BAB* are given in the text. Atlas was also the author of 'Chicago's Grumpy Guru', the *Times* article on Allan Bloom where this quoted remark originally appeared. It was later mentioned by Alfred Kazin in the *New Yorker* of 7 March 1994, and Bellow responded three days later in the *New York Times*, claiming a journalistic 'misunderstanding', and insisting that 'Nowhere in print, under my name, is there a single reference to Papuans or Zulus'. Willis Salomon discusses the situation at some length in 'Biography, Elegy, and the Politics of Modernity in Saul Bellow's *Ravelstein*', in Gloria L. Cronin and Lee Trepanier (eds.), *A Political Companion to Saul Bellow* (Lexington, 2013), pp. 172-4.

'Lasting Man', *The New Republic*, 3 Mar. 2011, <[www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/83143/saul-bellows-letters-review](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/83143/saul-bellows-letters-review)> (accessed 8 Feb. 2016).

<sup>3</sup> 'Moving Quickly', a 1994 interview with Robert Boyers, collected in a special issue of *Salmagundi*, 106-7 (Spring/Summer 1995), 40; *Saul Bellow: Collected Stories* (New York, 2001), p. 412.

<sup>4</sup> *Conversations with Saul Bellow*, ed. Gloria L. Cronin and Ben Siegel (Jackson, 1994), pp. 185, 283, 63. Further references are given in the text.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Distracted Public' (1990), in *It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future* (1994), p. 156.

<sup>6</sup> References in the text are to volume and page of *The Complete Novels of Saul Bellow*, ed. James Wood, 4 vols. (New York, 2003-15).

<sup>7</sup> Gloria L. Cronin, 'Searching the Narrative Gap: Authorial Self-Irony and the Problematic Discussion of Western Misogyny in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*', in L. H. Goldman, Gloria L. Cronin, and Ada Aharoni (eds.), *Saul Bellow: A Mosaic* (New York, 1992), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Louis Gallo, 4 Apr. 1961, in *Saul Bellow: Letters*, ed. Benjamin Taylor (New York, 2010), p. 217.

<sup>9</sup> 'The French as Dostoevsky Saw Them', *The New Republic* (May 1955); repr. in *It All Adds Up*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Mailer, 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster', *Dissent: A Quarterly of Politics and Culture* (Fall 1957), <[www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957)> (accessed 8 Feb. 2016).

<sup>11</sup> 'Man Underground: On Ralph Ellison', in *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About: Collected Non-Fiction*, ed. Benjamin Taylor (New York, 2015), p. 62.

- <sup>12</sup> See 'Recent Fiction: A Tour of Inspection', in *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*, pp. 189-91.
- <sup>13</sup> John J. Clayton, *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man*, 2nd edn. (Bloomington, 1979), pp. 238, 247.
- <sup>14</sup> Mariann Russell, 'White Man's Black Man: Three Views', *CLA Journal*, 17 (1973), 93-100: 93.
- <sup>15</sup> Laurie Grobman, 'African Americans in Roth's "Goodbye Columbus", Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and Malamud's *The Natural*', *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 14 (1995), 80-9: 81.
- <sup>16</sup> Zachary Leader, *The Life of Saul Bellow: To Fame and Fortune, 1915-1964* (2015), p. 35.
- <sup>17</sup> Richard Hinchcliffe, 'Striking A. Chorde: The Dean's Melancholy Vision of Blackness', *Saul Bellow Journal*, 16/2 (Summer 2000), 186-214: 193; emphasis in original.
- <sup>18</sup> This quotation is taken from 'Cloister Culture' (1966), repr. in *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*, p. 211.
- <sup>19</sup> *Collected Stories*, p. xiii.
- <sup>20</sup> Clayton, *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man*, p. 29.
- <sup>21</sup> Leader, *The Life of Saul Bellow*, p. 392.
- <sup>22</sup> Gloria L. Cronin, 'Our Father's Politics: Gregory, Adam and Daniel Bellow', in Cronin and Trepanier (eds.), *A Political Companion to Saul Bellow*, p. 202.
- <sup>23</sup> Cited by Leader in *The Life of Saul Bellow*, p. 436.
- <sup>24</sup> *Letters*, ed. Taylor, p. 510.
- <sup>25</sup> Alan Bilton, 'The Colored City: Saul Bellow's Chicago and Images of Blackness', *Saul Bellow Journal*, 16/2 (Summer 2000), 104-28: 113.
- <sup>26</sup> Donald W. Markos, 'Life Against Death in *Henderson the Rain King*', in Gerhard Bach (ed.), *The Critical Response to Saul Bellow* (Westport, Conn., 1995), p. 113.
- <sup>27</sup> 'Moving Quickly', p. 45.
- <sup>28</sup> See, for example, 'Mr Bellow's Planet', his *New Yorker* interview of 23 May 1994, with David Remnick: 'There seems to be such a taboo on open discussion that no habits of discussion have developed ... because you are immediately labelled a racist' (*Conversations*, p. 295).
- <sup>29</sup> Leader's biography is informed throughout by an awareness of Bellow's indebtedness to Romantic thought, and Wordsworth in particular. For more on this subject, see Mark Sandy, '"Webbed with Golden Lines": Saul Bellow's Romanticism', *Romanticism*, 14/1 (2008), 57-67.
- <sup>30</sup> James Clements, 'Bottomless Surfaces: Saul Bellow's "Refreshed Phrenology"', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33/1 (Fall 2009), 75-91: 77.
- <sup>31</sup> Ellen Pifer, *Saul Bellow: Against the Grain* (Philadelphia, 1990), 96; Nicholas Delbanco 'On Bellow', *Salmagundi*, 106-7 (Spring/Summer, 1995), 81-4: 84; Robert R. Dutton *Saul Bellow*, revised edn. (Boston, 1982), p. 95. For Henderson's statement, see *Saul Bellow: Novels*, ed. Wood, ii. 253.
- <sup>32</sup> 'A World Too Much With Us', in *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*, p. 275.
- <sup>33</sup> Cronin, 'Searching the Narrative Gap', p. 105.
- <sup>34</sup> "'I Got a Scheme!': With Philip Roth", in *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*, p.

494.

- <sup>35</sup> Sukhbir Singh, 'The Political Satire in *Henderson the Rain King*', *Saul Bellow Journal*, 18/2 (Spring 1985), 23-39: 25.
- <sup>36</sup> Carol R. Smith, 'The Jewish Atlantic: The Deployment of Blackness in Saul Bellow', in Cronin and Trepanier (eds.), *A Political Companion to Saul Bellow*, p. 106 (repr. from *Saul Bellow Journal*, 17/1 (Fall, 2000), 253-79).
- <sup>37</sup> *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*, p. 300.
- <sup>38</sup> 'Hemingway and the Image of Man', *ibid.*, p. 55.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Lighting Out for the Global Territory: Postwar Revisions of Cultural Anthropology and Jewish American Identity in Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*', *ELH*, 80/1 (Spring 2013), 287-316: 288.
- <sup>40</sup> Michael LeMahieu, *Fictions of Fact and Value: The Erasure of Logical Positivism in American Literature, 1945-1975* (New York, 2013), p. 151.
- <sup>41</sup> Leader, *The Life of Saul Bellow*, p. 69.
- <sup>42</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York, 1993), pp. 32-3, 58-9.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>44</sup> *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*, p. 285.
- <sup>45</sup> LeMahieu, *Fictions of Fact and Value*, p. 150.
- <sup>46</sup> Gloria Cronin, 'A Disrupting Darkness Before His Eyes: The Racial Subject in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*', in Ben Siegel and Jay L. Halio (eds.), *American Literary Dimensions: Poems and Essays in Honor of Melvin J. Friedman* (Cranbury, NJ, 1999), p. 136.
- <sup>47</sup> 'Man Underground: On Ralph Ellison', p. 61.
- <sup>48</sup> Kasia Boddy, 'The White Boy Looks at the Black Boy: Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and the Great Omni-American Novel', *Saul Bellow Journal*, 16/2 (Summer 2000), 51-73: 58.
- <sup>49</sup> The quotations above can be found in 'Ralph Ellison in Tivoli', in *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*, pp. 417, 418, 420.
- <sup>50</sup> Singh, 'Political Satire in *Henderson the Rain King*', p. 25.
- <sup>51</sup> Stephanie S. Halldorson, *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction: The Works of Saul Bellow and Don DeLillo* (New York, 2007), pp. 32, 33; Norman Podhoretz, *Doings and Undoings: The Fifties and After in American Writing* (New York, 1964), p. 220.
- <sup>52</sup> Halldorson, *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction*, p. 36.
- <sup>53</sup> Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York, 1974), p. 245.
- <sup>54</sup> Daniel K. Muhlestein, 'The Politics of Art: The Colonial Library Meets the Carnavalesque in *Henderson the Rain King*', in Cronin and Trepanier (eds.), *A Political Companion to Saul Bellow*, p. 97; Markos, 'Life Against Death in *Henderson the Rain King*', p. 115.